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SP350: Issues in Broadcasting  
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Comment to FCC

Media Ownership Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking – Docket 06-121

During the summer of 2006, I was an intern at WVIK, the Illinois/Iowa Quad Cities' National Public Radio branch, broadcasting at 90.3 FM from Rock Island, Illinois. The internship was an incredibly rewarding experience and I learned enough about journalism to solidify my decision to begin a career in it when I graduate from Augustana College in May 2008. Aside from the technological and conventional things I learned at WVIK, though, the main reason why I loved working there was because of the relationship I created with our local audience and the freedom to choose what I wanted to choose in order to best serve the public interest.

This comment is a response to the Federal Communications Commission's Newspaper/Broadcast Cross-Ownership Ban. If the FCC were to change this media ownership law to allow an entity to own a combination of either broadcast stations or daily newspapers, I cannot imagine enjoying my experience at WVIK as much as I did this summer. Even though WVIK is not owned by a daily newspaper or full-service broadcast station, the news team still uses the local newspapers and television stations to help us when we create our newscasts. Through observing other media outlets, though, we are never entitled to report the same stories, which is an aspect of WVIK I believe our audience respects. The freedom to choose what we believe is the right news for the Quad City community was the most important aspect of my internship, because I felt I had a relationship with my audience and I knew I was tending to the public interest.

Aside from my personal experience in radio, there are several other reasons why the Newspaper/Broadcast Cross-Ownership Ban should continue to prohibit entities from owning a combination of broadcast stations or newspapers. One reason is the growing effect media have on its audience. In its article, "Strong Opposition to Media Cross-Ownership Emerges," The Pew Research Center states, "By a 55% to 29% margin, most Americans say the media's influence is growing, not decreasing." To explain the 29% in this statistic, Robert McChesney, co-founder of the Free Press and author of The Problem of the Media, says one of the myths which surround the media is the notion that the media only reflect reality and have no power or interest to shape it. In response to this myth, McChesney states, "...Media are a social force in their own right, and not just a reflection of other forces."

Media's power to shape reality is also prominent in what the public have access to regarding their news, especially if the Newspaper/Broadcast Cross-Ownership Ban is relaxed. According to the Free Press website, "...Mergers will create gargantuan entities with unheard of power over not only what people see, hear and read everyday, but *what* people can access, *who* will have access to communications technologies, and *what people can do* with information they obtain." Though some people may think this power would actually help the public, I see it as being very scary – and many people agree with me. In a survey conducted by The Pew Research Center, it shows, "Overall, half say the FCC decision would have a negative impact on the country, up from 34% in February [2003]."

Another reason why the FCC should continue prohibiting entities from owning a combination of broadcast stations or newspapers is the notion of "consolidating" the public's news, instead of "diversifying" it. Ben H. Bagdikian, in his article, "The Media Monopoly," states, "The American population is remarkably diverse in background, politics, geography, and tastes, and has always needed this variety reflected in a parallel diversity in its public information and entertainment." In order to prevent a media monopoly, the FCC must remember the significance of having different perspectives on issues. In fact, isn't this why I am sending this comment to the FCC? Through producing an interactive community instead of assuming the FCC knows what the public interest always is, we can create media ownership rules which emphasize the idea of a real democracy. In addition, according to Robert McChesney, "...A democratic media system – or a democratic solution to the problem of the media...- would necessitate a large, well-funded, structurally pluralistic, and diverse nonprofit and noncommercial media sector, as well as a more competitive and decentralized commercial sector."

One way to ensure the public has its voice on laws which directly concern them is through creating open forums and public meetings in all 50 states twice a year. Since the FCC must review media ownership regulations every two years, these public meetings would allow each state to be involved in the FCC's decision-making process and be heard at least four times. In their article, "Up in Flames," by Robert McChesney and John Nichols, Independent Representative Bernie Sanders, said, "The American people know they are getting less information than they had before about decisions that are being made in their name, and they know that we are passing some critical points where, if we don't act, citizens are not going to have the information they need to function in a democracy." The FCC has the power to change their reputation and to become involved with the *real* public's interest.

Finally, one last reason why the FCC should continue its Newspaper/Broadcast Cross-Ownership Ban returns to the reason why I enjoyed working at WVIK. Through broadcasting news which directly affects the Quad City community, I felt connected with my listeners as though I conducted a public duty which helped my listeners feel more connected with the world. Localized news, where the media and the people have an interactive relationship, is vital to the expansion and quality of media in the United States. As the Free Press points out, “Local access means giving communities the ability to create their own media and the power to decide how to best serve their own technology and communications needs.”

In conclusion, the Newspaper/Broadcast Cross-Ownership Ban should continue to prohibit large entities from owning a full-service broadcast station or daily newspaper because the media have a growing influence on its audience, “consolidation” of media outlets could lead to one-size-fits-all news, and local news is an important aspect of communities, such as the Quad Cities. Through providing states with at least two public hearings a year and allowing the public to have a larger voice on media issues, the FCC will be able to arrive at a conclusion that meets both the power public and the local public’s interest. Although the debates over media ownership laws have become more prominent, these discussions can be viewed as benefits to saving our democracy. As Robert McChesney says, “We may be entering an era of profound public debate over the very nature of our media system. If this is the case, it will lead to new solutions to the problem of the media, with a clear change in the nature of the immediate media content people experience in their lives.”

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